DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 176 717 IR 007 541

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TITLE The First Soviet-American Library Seminar: A Summary.
PUB DATE May 79
NOTE 7p.; For related documents, see IR 007 541-547

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Comparative Analysis; International Programs; *Library Administration; Library Education; Library Networks; *Library Planning; Library Programs; *Library Role; Library Services; National Libraries; Seminars
IDENTIFIERS *United States; *USSR

ABSTRACT

The first Soviet-American Library Seminar provided general comparisons and contrasts, similarities and dissimilarities, between Soviet and American libraries, and stressed the differences in understanding library terms, the need for long-range planning, demographic changes and their effect on library services, and library automation. An introductory session outlined procedures to be observed and presented representatives of the host organizations. Opening presentations described the library as a "multimedia catalog of many civilizations" and praised the collaboration between the USSR and the United States in the library field, observing that such cooperation is within the terms of the Helsinki accord. During the formal afternoon sessions, Soviet delegates presented condensed versions of prepared papers and American reactors commented on each paper and asked questions drawn from prepared reactions. Afternoon presentations from the Soviet representatives discussed development and planning in Soviet library systems, library statistics, the role of the national library, the role of libraries in the satisfaction of the information needs of specialists, the network of children's libraries, and training of librarians. (CWM)

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THE FIRST SOVIET-AMERICAN LIBRARY SEMINAR:

A SUMMARY

by

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The First Soviet-American Library Seminar: A Summary

Murray L. Howder

The First Soviet-American Library Seminar was held May 4-6, 1979, in Washington, D.C. The Seminar was sponsored by the American Library Association, the Library of Congress, and the U.S. International Communication Agency. The working sessions took place in the Loy Henderson Conference Room at the Department of State. This beautifully appointed room, done mostly in blue and brown, is arranged in a horseshoe pattern. It contains ample microphones and facilities for full delegate participation. Simultaneous interpretation was provided in English and Russian, the two official languages of the Seminar. Furthermore, English translations of the Soviet papers were provided to the participants. Some of those whose status was "observer/participant" attended only part of the Seminar, but at all times there were about 70 observers.

The first morning was an introductory session. The moderator, Jean Lowrie, Director, School of Librarianship, Western Michigan University and Chair, ALA International Relations Committee, outlined the procedures to be observed during the Seminar and presented the representatives of the host organizations. Daniel J. Boorstin, Librarian of Congress, described the Library as a "multimedia catalog of many civilizations"; he praised the collaboration between the USSR and the USA in the library field, which he termed

remarkable because of their vastly different views of art and culture. In his welcoming remarks, David Nalle of the International Communication Agency stressed people as the important thing in contacts between the US and the USSR.

The leader of the eight-person Soviet delegation was V.V. Serov, Head of the Library Directorate, Ministry of Culture of the USSR. He observed that cooperation between US and Soviet libraries is within the terms of the Helsinki pact. He traced the exchange of books back to 1921. Since then more than 70 of the largest Soviet libraries have made well established arrangements. Currently, Soviet libraries receive 33,000 books and 230,000 journals each year in return for 66,000 books and 210,000 journals sent to the US.

Robert Wedgeworth, ALA Executive Director, concluded the introductory session by agreeing that the Seminar is an effective means of implementing the cultural aspects of the Helsinki accord.

The formal sessions began in the afternoon. Each Soviet delegate presented a condensed version of a prepared paper which had been distributed beforehand. An American reactor commented on each paper and asked questions drawn from a prepared reaction. Some time was available after each paper for other panel members and observers to ask questions also.

On the first afternoon, Mr. Serov presented remarks based on his paper "The Soviet Library System and Its Planning". He stated that the aim of Soviet

libraries is to draw practically the entire population into libraries by stressing the value of books. To do this, Soviet librarianship was practically revamped after the Revolution of 1917. Before the Revolution, libraries were not accessible to many people because either of distance or widespread illiteracy. Today the entire Soviet population is literate, and the large majority of people use public libraries regularly. There are separate library services for children and for adolescents. There are also professional libraries financed by the professional societies. Many national groups have their own libraries. State planning and centralized leadership are the main factors in the development of Soviet libraries and in the training of library personnel. Planners are now forecasting needs for the 1990's and the early years of the next century. The important features which distinguish Soviet libraries are:

1) Full Government financing;

2) General Government standards and quotas;

3) Centralized technical processing;

4) The reality of general accessibility to libraries.

On Saturday morning, E.A. Fenelonov discussed library statistics, and I.P. Osipova described the role of the national library in the Soviet library system.

Following lunch, I.K. Kirpicheva talked about the role of libraries in the satisfaction of the information needs of specialists. She observed that specialists don't want librarians to keep them from using resources independently.

In response to a question about providing information in the US, which was raised by a member of Soviet delegation, this observer used the structure of the ERIC system to illustrate the roles of the Federal Government, nonprofit institutions, and for-profit companies in running an information system.

The final speaker of the day, N.S. Kobzarenko, described the extensive network of children's libraries in the USSR. She declared that, without exception, all children in the USSR are required to read in the library as a part of their education.

On Sunday morning, K.I. Abramov talked about the training of librarians. In the final paper of the Seminar, he emphasized that in the USSR great attention is paid to foreign language competency, especially English, and that American textbooks (in English - not translated) are used in their courses, particularly for studying foreign library methods and procedures.

In summary, as the moderator said, the Seminar provided general comparisons and contrasts, similarities and dissimilarities, between Soviet

and American libraries. It provided a mutual learning experience. It showed that some terms, such as networking, depository, centralization, and budget control, mean different things to Russians and Americans. Long-range planning is most essential in the USSR, but the most effective techniques are not known with certainty. Both the USSR and the USA have similar aims for libraries in that they both hope to reach all people, and they both recognize that demographic changes require changes in library services. The major difference between the US and the USSR is the formal structure linking library programs of organizational components. Although both countries are interested in library automation, they are on different levels of development in this regard.

This general program suggested many possible topics for future Soviet-American library seminars around more specialized areas, such as information delivery, technical processing, and others. All participants expressed the hope that these seminars would in fact become annual meetings. The Russians offered to host the second seminar in Moscow.